

**Report to the 35th General Assembly
FIG Working Week 2012 in Rome, Italy**

Working Group on Voting Rights

1. Introduction

The Working Group (WG) was elected by the General Assembly “from the floor” in Marrakech and was made up of nominated *countries*. Countries nominated were Belgium (388 members), Canada (708), Denmark (1007), Germany (8000), Hong Kong SAR (4614), Ireland (285), Italy (100,000), Kenya (255), Lebanon (437), New Zealand (1034), The Netherlands (1200), South Africa (591) and the USA (504).

Subsequently, Vice President Iain Greenway organised the populating of the Working Group with people from the nominated countries; Belgium (Axel Anneart), Canada (George McFarlane), Denmark (Henning Elmstroem), Germany (Karl-Friedrich Thöne), Hong Kong SAR (Edward Au), Ireland (Brendan Arrigan), Italy (Fausto Savoldi), Kenya (Collins Kowour), Lebanon (Yaacoub Saade), New Zealand (Brian Coutts), The Netherlands (Kees de Zeeuw) and the USA (Steve Nystrom). He then conducted an election for Chair of the Working Group. On an equality of votes the task of Chair fell to Brian Coutts of New Zealand by lot. However, this process consumed two months of the limited time. South Africa, one of the nominated countries did not reply to the request for nominees and so fell off the circulation list. Henning Elmstroem from Denmark was appointed Vice Chair, and the Working Group declined, by majority vote, applications to be included from two other bodies.

In order to progress the necessary work as expeditiously as possible, all participants were requested to propose, in confidence, their views on possible alternatives to the existing system for us all to consider. It was emphasised at that point that their national or personal views should be put aside and consideration given to what would be in the best interests of FIG. It was also pointed out that this Working Group was concerned with Voting Rights only, and that the issue of subscriptions, while it was possible to make connections between subscriptions and voting, should not enter into this discussion. It took a further three months to get an almost full set of answers, and the suggestions that came from them are outlined below. Lebanon made no response and has not replied to any further communications since indicating its nominee.

The responses ranged from support for the *status quo* to other quite radical mechanisms. In the meantime Henning Elmstroem of Denmark undertook to research the history related to the changes of the statutes that had taken place over past years. The result of Henning’s very valuable work is attached as an Appendix 1 to this report. Maria Joao Henriques of Portugal, on her own initiative, produced a research report in January 2012, outlining the participation in General Assemblies by member associations over the last 10 years. As it adds considerable value to the understanding of the effect of the voting process, this report is also attached to this report as Appendix 2, for the information of delegates.

I am deliberately not attributing views to those who put them forward, nor do I present them as my own, so that any personality issues, national positions or personal positions are not introduced into the discussion, and neutrality is maintained as much as possible.

The options identified, briefly, were as follows: -

- Status quo - one member/one vote.
- Return to previous - one country/one vote.
- Weighted voting - based on member associations own membership numbers
 - 5 tiers (<100/100-1k/1k-2k/2k-5.5k/<5.5k)
 - Weighted voting - 3 tiers (<1k/1k-4k/>4k) or (<2k/2-4k/>4k).
 - Weighted voting - 2 tiers
 - in order to meet common aims with UN should empower small nations
 - cut-off at 1k members, or at 2k members.
- World zones - each zone given so many voting points,
 - one country/one vote,
 - votes are converted to zone points.
- Population-based voting - each country gets votes in proportion to its population, say 1 vote per 40 million inhabitants. Countries with low Human Development Indexes would be given one extra vote

If any system is adopted that involves weighting the number of votes, then further consideration becomes necessary to decide where the “break-points” occur between the tiers.

The suggestions were then summarised for WG members in a short paper, the summary circulated with a few comments from the Chair, and requesting further views. Little has been forthcoming since then, other than entrenchment of existing positions already expressed, or no comment.

2. The Options

Voting by member association

Three members of the WG supported the existing system, that of one member/one vote. It was suggested that any other system, especially more votes for larger associations, would tend to marginalise smaller countries, and that this was not in conformity with FIG’s own mission. If the objective, as stated, is to collaborate with the UN, and to promote the disciplines within developing countries, increasing the “weight” of larger, wealthier countries was not consistent with this. It might also be noted that in many countries, voting rights are equal for all citizens. Status, wealth, taxation contribution or age do not affect the right of the individual to vote, or impact on the weight of their vote. Two further associations suggested compromise was necessary, but only because the issue had been raised and was the topic of debate. They concluded that, therefore, there must be a problem and some alternative must be necessary. It is not clear how widespread the belief that there is a “problem” permeates the membership.

Voting by country

One member of the WG specifically supported the return to one country/one vote. This is the system used by the UN. It allows every country to have the same weight when it comes to voting. There was a stated concern that if the weighting of larger countries was increased, if they were to work together, and given that 3 of the largest were in Europe, they could be dominant. It was also suggested that one member/one vote could encourage the division of existing members into smaller specialised associations (e.g. based on language in a multi-lingual country, or by sub-discipline) which would not be to the benefit of FIG (or possibly themselves).

One other member of the WG advocated voting by country regardless of the number of associations, but proposed a tiered voting allocation to countries based on the population of the country, e.g. one vote for every 40 million people. This suggestion also offered a compromise by allowing countries with a low Human Development Index an additional vote.

Weighted voting

As an alternative to the present system, the most common suggestion was to give larger associations more votes in relation to the number of members within each association. This was discussed at the break-out session as well as the General Assembly in Marrakech. All of these offerings appeared (since it was not always explicitly stated) to agree with maintaining voting by member associations rather than by countries, but giving some members additional votes in proportion to the membership numbers they represented. Seven members of the WG proposed, or were prepared to support as a compromise, a tiered system of voting. There was relatively wide variation on how many tiers there might be. However, there appeared to be some obvious points on the scale of association membership numbers at which the “break points” might be established, but the suggestions were very much dependant on how many tiers were supported.

One option was for a **5-tier system**. Tiers could be defined as -

- 0-999 members, 1 vote (80% of associations);
- 1000-1999, 2 votes (12%);
- 2000-3999, 3 votes (4%);
- 4000-9999, 4 votes (2%);
- more than 10,000 5 votes (2%).

A second **5-tier system** suggested -

- fewer than 100 members, 1 vote (27%);
- 101-1000, 2 votes (54%);
- 1001-2000, 3 votes (10%);
- 2001-5500, 4 votes (5%);
- and more than 5501, 5 votes (4%).

A second option was for a **3-tier system**. One suggestion was simply for small, medium and large, without further definition. A second suggestion was –

- 1-1999 members, 1 vote (91%);
- 2000-3999, 2 votes (4%);

4000 (5%) or more, 3 votes.

A third suggestion was for –

0-999 members, 1 vote (80%);

1000-3999, 2 votes (15%);

more than 4000, 3 votes (5%).

Finally there was an option for a **2-tier** system. One suggestion was for

1-2000, 1 vote (91%);

more than 2000, 2 votes (9%).

A second suggestion in the 2-tier system was –

1-1000, 1 vote (80%);

more than 1000, 2 votes (20%).

In assessing the submissions in support of a weighted voting system, there was not wide support for 5-tiers, but there was strong opposition from some members to a system as extensive as 5 tiers. Their opposition was based on the concentration of voting with the larger, potentially richer, and more regularly attending associations that could result.

World regions or zones

There was one suggestion of dividing the world into regions or zones. Zones could be decided on a variety of criteria. They could be defined such that each zone had equal weight, or they could be allocated “voting points” depending on their size or number of associations. This could incorporate either member associations or countries voting within their region and could include a tiered voting system for either member associations or countries.

3. Comments of the Chair

The Working Group is based on the premise that there is something wrong with the present system and that it is in need of fixing. From the submissions there is not a common agreement that the present system is, in fact, defective. It is acknowledged by some that, while it is not perfect, it may be the best we can get. There are comments that suggest alternatives are only being considered because a compromise is necessary. Other than those that promoted 5 categories in Marrakech, there is a reluctance to accept more than 3 categories by most. Again, this is seen by some only as a compromise. Only one member was in favour of returning to a one country/one vote system.

If a change is to be made it would appear that the more radical suggestions would not have widespread support, if the WG is representative of the membership at large. Neither does it seem would a return to the former method of one country/one vote. While this is favoured by some, it appears to ignore the changes to FIG that have taken place in recent years where FIG has grown considerably, but to some extent because there is more than one member association from some countries. This seems to be why the statutes were changed from the former method of one country/one vote. While in some countries amalgamations have taken place to improve and coordinate the voice of the surveying community within their own country, there are other “cultures” in which diverse professional groups, while embraced by the FIG definition of a Surveyor, view themselves as quite distinct professions. In some places this applies to Valuers and to Quantity Surveyors at least. Again, in some countries,

these sub-disciplines of the global definition of a Surveyor wish to be part of FIG, while in others countries their needs are met in other groupings.

It appears that there are not only political differences showing up, but quite probably cultural differences as well. If this is so, then it further compounds the possibility of the Working Group reaching a single recommendation, or of finding a unanimously favoured outcome in the General Assembly. If any agreement on a voting system different from the present one is to be adopted, it is clear that there must be comprises from existing positions by the proponents for change. From the submissions it seems unlikely that a 5-tier system would find broad enough support to succeed, assuming the WG is representative of the membership. It might therefore be concluded that the best chance of success, by compromise, will be either a 2-tiered or a 3-tiered system.

Whatever system is adopted, it must be fair, easily understood and be simple to operate. In principle it needs to be as democratic as possible and as inclusive as possible. No member should be made to feel that their vote is so insignificant that they cannot make a difference. Maybe larger countries need to be magnanimous in their consideration of small nations and small associations, and maybe small associations need to be more confident in the diversity of opinion represented in the larger associations, and that the fear of block voting by large bodies, while possible, is not really very likely.

Another matter that members need to consider is that the real benefit and work of FIG is achieved through the structures of the Commissions and the delegates themselves along with the President and the Council. The number of issues that go to a formal secret ballot in a General Assembly are few, though significant, as in the elections for FIG office-bearers. Whenever a decision can be reached on the issue of Voting Rights, it has been suggested that it would be useful to also place a ban on raising the matter again for a specified period, say 10 years.

The other important issue that is subject to ballot is the allocation of conferences venues. It has been suggested that this could be handled differently by moving the decision on venues to the Council and removing it from the popular vote. Such a move would allow other considerations to be taken into account, such as the view of Corporate Members and sponsors, limit political influences and lobbying and ensure a geographical distribution of events. This does not require a change to the FIG Statutes.

It has also been suggested that the timing of the second session of the General Assembly be reviewed. While there are sound reasons why it is placed at the end of the Working Week or Congress at present, it is also noted that many delegates, because of their uncertainty as to the timing of the conclusion of the General Assembly, or simply to conform to international flight timetables and avoid a further night's accommodation, are forced to depart while the GA is still in session. Any change to this is also not a matter that would require a change to the FIG Statutes.

Brian J Coutts

Chair

FIG Working Group on Voting Rights

24 February 2012